Maintenance of Towers and Poles with Osprey Nests

The only member of its family, the Osprey (Pandion haliaetus) is a large fish eating bird of prey that occurs worldwide. The osprey measures 21-25 inches long (almost eagle-sized) and has a dark chocolate mantle with a white chest (which can be somewhat streaked with dark brown), a white head with a broad brown mask from eyes down cheeks and neck, yellow eyes, and a black bill and talons. Like many other birds of prey, the female is larger then the male. The female Osprey can have a wingspread of almost 5 feet and the male about 4 feet. Immature birds resemble adults, but their brown upper part feathers look as if the tips were dipped in cream-colored paint, and their eyes are orange.

Ospreys feed almost entirely on live fish that they locate while hovering 50' to 150' over the water. Like many birds of prey, the osprey catches fish by diving feet first into the water. When an Osprey emerges, it shakes the water from its feathers and lifts off with the fish in its talons. As soon as it clears the water, it arranges the fish in its talons to face forward to reduce drag.

Ospreys do not begin to breed until they are aged 3 to 5 years. Occasionally a pair will build a nest and establish a territory one year, only returning to breed the following year. It certainly seems to be the case that Ospreys, especially the males, return to breed in the vicinity from which they themselves fledge. They usually choose a site within 3-5 kilometres of water and prefer to have an open area around the future nest so as to have easy access when landing. Flat-topped trees are the most likely natural site, but Ospreys take readily to man-made structures such as power poles and radio towers.

The large, bulky nest of the osprey is constructed of rough sticks in a structure five or more feet in diameter and several feet thick containing two to three eggs. Egg-laying can occur anytime during the 3rd week of December through the 1st week of April. Incubation is then approximately 35 days. Fledging, or nestling after first flight, is 8 weeks after hatching. Post Fledging can last a few days to several weeks after first flight. Post Fledgling is the period when young are still under parental care but are free-flying.

Guidelines for Working on Towers

Communication towers, weather towers, camera towers, light poles, and other large, slender structures are prime nesting sites at KSC. This proves to be a burden during maintenance operations for these structures or, in the case of camera towers, can be stressful for both osprey and personnel manning the tower. No operations or maintenance may be performed on a structure during the months of December through May if a nest contains an active osprey.

In many parts of their range Ospreys have used artificial nests especially if built over water. This may be an option.

PLATFORM DESIGN

Once a suitable location is determined, you will need to make arrangements to have a utility pole or something similar erected, preferably to a height of 30 to 40 feet. This is what the platform will sit upon. Utility companies often will sell and install old poles, for a price. In Lee County, those interested can contact Florida Power and Light Company or the Lee County Electric Cooperative. It is also essential to contact your local city or county building department to find out if a building permit is required to erect the platform.

Below is one suggested design for a platform to be mounted on a utility pole. Variations in design or materials are certainly possible. Remember that this platform will be exposed to the elements, so all wood should be pressure treated, and the platform should be examined after a few years to determine its condition.

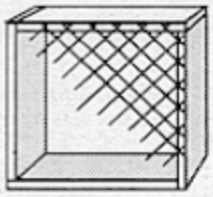
In addition to this design, particularly in areas that are not suitable to heavy equipment, a design known as the "Sanibel Tripod" can be used. Essentially, this is similar to a three-legged tepee that can be transported to a site and erected manually by four or five adults. For more information on this alternative design, or for membership information, please contact The International Osprey Foundation at P.O. Box 250, Sanibel, Florida, 33957-0250.

Disclaimer: **Neither Lee County, the International Osprey Foundation, or their employees shall be held responsible for injuries incurred in the construction or installation of platform or for the faulty construction or installation of platforms that may result in damage or injury. The installer assumes all risks in erection of structure.**

List of Materials

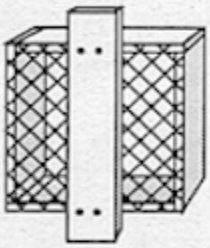
4 - 2"x4"x3' P.T. boards (Frame)
2- 2"x4"x6' P.T. boards (Braces)
1- 2"x6"x4' P.T. board (Base board)
1- 3' square chain link fence
1- 3' square of aluminum sheet
4 - 6" galvanized lag bolts or nails
Assorted Galvanized nails & staples as needed

STEP #1:
Nail the four frame boards together.



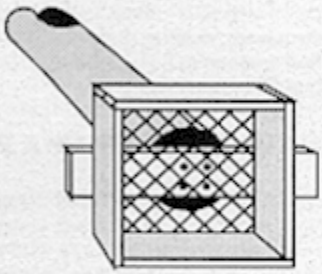
STEP #2:
Staple the chain link fence to the top of the platform frame.

STEP #3:
Nail the base board across the middle of the platform frame.

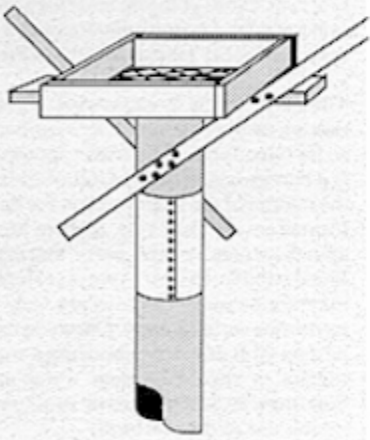


STEP #4:
Turn entire platform over so that the base board is on the bottom. Mount the platform on the top of the pole using the 6 inch nails, before the pole is placed upright.

STEP #5:
Mount the brace boards on opposite sides of the platform, with one end attached to the pole and the other end attached to the base board, extending a few feet above the platform.



STEP #6:
Wrap the sheet of aluminum around the pole so that it will be at least 10 feet above ground level after the pole is planted. (This acts as a guard against raccoons climbing the pole into the nest.)



STEP #7:
Plant the pole at the chosen location. To help attract ospreys to the platform, place a few sticks (no larger than 3/4 inches in diameter and 18 inches long) within it.